

The Creature That Came to Ponyville

A My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic fanfiction by Friendly Uncle

Part 2: The Birth

"So all I have to do is pull this taught, right?"

"Uh uh. Just hold it steady while I put in the stake."

Rainbow Dash shrugged and did as she was bid, grabbing the length of rope in her teeth and yanking it parallel to the ground while Fluttershy used her hooves to pound a long stake into the dirt. That done, she helped the other pegasus wrap the rope tightly around the stake and tie it off.

"Thank you so much Rainbow Dash. It's so much easier to fix with two ponies, I was worried this would take me all day."

"Yeah huh," said Rainbow Dash, hovering a few feet above the ground in order to get a better look at the project. Fluttershy's rope, as well as several others, was attached to a complicated looking wooden construction that had been sunk into the river just after a large bend. It looked like a dam, but it didn't seem to prevent any of the water from flowing through it.

"... what is it?"

"Oh! I'm sorry, didn't I tell you? It's a trap."

Rainbow Dash blinked.

"A trap? Like, for catching animals?"

Fluttershy nodded.

"See, when the gate is closed the water can get through the grid, but fish above a certain size can't. So the current catches them and pulls them into this little pool here, and it keeps them nice and fresh until I need some. When I have enough all I have to do is pull this rope here, and the gate opens and the fish can all leave."

Rainbow Dash was staring at her friend as if she'd just sprouted an extra head. Fluttershy blinked and shrank back a little, unconsciously letting her mane fall over her face to escape Rainbow Dash's gaze.

"What... what's the matter?"

"Fluttershy, you're a fish murderer!"

Rainbow Dash pointed her hoof accusingly. Fluttershy squeaked and backed away.

"What!? I... I... I don't... I mean... I need the fish to... to feed some of the other animals... it isn't their fault they're... carnivores... It's the circle of life!"

"I never thought I would see the day," said Rainbow Dash, awed, "if anypony had ever asked me who the most harmless pony in all of Poinville was, I would have pointed to Fluttershy every time! 'Oh, Fluttershy would never hurt a fly!' I'd say. But apparently the fish aren't safe!"

Fluttershy's muzzle was nearly touching the ground.

"I... I didn't realize... you cared so much about fish..."

"Oh, I don't really care about the fish, I just think it's hysterical."

Fluttershy's eyes narrowed and her head rose back up. Rainbow Dash grinned at her. Off to one side Angel Bunny seemed to be rolling around on the ground, laughing uproariously.

"This is a whole new side to you that I've never seen before! Fluttershy, the fish slayer! I'd say it makes you about, oh, five per cent cooler."

"It's not something I'm proud of."

"You should be!"

Fluttershy sighed. Rainbow Dash suddenly scooted up beside her, throwing a foreleg over the yellow pegasus' withers.

"You ever try any?"

Fluttershy seemed alarmed.

"What!?"

"Try any fish! You catch 'em all the time, so you must wonder what they taste like. I would!"

Fluttershy's ears flattened over the back of her skull and she shrank away from the blue pegasus.

"No. No I've never wondered what they taste like."

"Not even a little?"

"... well... m-m-maybe just a teensy bit."

Rainbow Dash shot straight up into the air, mouth open wide in shock.

"That's sick, Fluttershy."

"I'm not sick! You said you would too!"

"I would if I was a *fish murderer!*"

Fluttershy looked like she was about to cry, but Rainbow Dash just laughed. After a moment of uninterrupted mirth Fluttershy's distressed expression slowly gave way to annoyance. Rainbow Dash fluttered back down to the ground, still giggling.

"You're just making fun of me, aren't you?"

"No way! I'm not laughing at you, I'm laughing with you! It's totally different!"

"...really?"

"No, not really."

Fluttershy pouted cutely. Rainbow Dash patted her on the back with her hoof.

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone about your secret dead fish fetish."

Fluttershy started sobbing.

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Dollars to Donuts woke up.

This wasn't something she would have expected to be able to do. When that spidery creature had leaped out of the egg and onto her face she was sure that she was going to die. She wondered for a second if that in fact had happened and she was in pony heaven, but she ached far too much for that. Her muscles were stiff from lying on the ground and her throat hurt abominably. Dollars coughed and looked around. She appeared to still be in the Everfree Forest, and there was the crater, and there was the creature that had pounced on her face.

Letting out a deafening shriek, Dollars to Donuts jumped to her hooves and scrambled away from the spidery creature. It tipped over onto its back and lay still. Panting and groaning over

the

pain in her sore throat, Dollars backed away further from the tiny nightmare, waiting for it to flip over and leap at her face again. When that hadn't happened after several moments she plucked up enough courage to break off a long branch from a nearby tree and, hesitantly, gave the spider thing a good poking. It continued to lie still.

"... did I poison it?"

Dollars to Donuts had encountered a variety of odd creatures in her day, but she'd never heard of an animal that attached itself to ponies' faces, strangled them into unconsciousness, and then died. Maybe it was like an insect that only lived outside of its pupal stage for a short while? Was it trying to mate with her?

She let that thought sink in for a long moment. Then her body made a game attempt at vomiting up everything that she had inside her. As it turned out, she didn't have much. Stumbling and groaning, she followed the smell of water to a large river she'd passed... earlier that day? Yesterday? How long had she been out? She was hungry enough for it to have been a whole week. Dollars plunged her head into the swiftly running water and drank for as long as her lungs would let her.

She'd lost her saddlebags at some point, probably dropped them while she was being assaulted.

But she could find them later. Right now she needed to eat. It was an almost physical compulsion as she bent down onto her knees and started clipping off mouthfuls of grass. It was surprisingly good, considering it was growing wild in the middle of a forest full of horrifying creatures. Of course, Dollars to Donuts was so hungry that she probably would have happily eaten cardboard. She made a mental note to head straight to Sweet Apple Acres when she got back to Ponyville. If she was going to apologize profusely to Applejack and promise to never ignore her friend's advice again she was going to do it over a slice of warm apple pie.

Dollars coughed. She must have been eating too fast, there was a sudden dull ache in her chest. She stepped back over to the stream for another drink.

"I'd better see the doc... ugh..."

The pain increased. It felt like she'd been kicked now. Dollars to Donuts tried to take another drink, but she couldn't stop coughing long enough. She couldn't breathe. Her chest was on fire.

"Wh-what... why..."

The last thing Dollars to Donuts felt was the snapping of her own ribs an instant before her torso exploded in an avalanche of gore. Without even the breath to scream, she slumped forwards into the river, and it could only be described as a mercy that she died very quickly.

Before she had the chance to see what she had birthed.

The creature was somewhat less fortunate, as its mother's final convulsions had hurled it into the river as well. Letting out its birth scream, the tiny horror was dragged under the surface and carried away by the current to parts unknown.

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Spike the dragon was lounging in the low-hanging branches of the combination tree/library he currently called home. His little dragon tummy was full and his scaly eyelids were heavy with sleep. A contented smile lit up his features as he let his mind wander to a particular pony whose flank was set with three dazzling gems.

"Well, someone looks cozy."

Spike blinked and glanced downwards. Applejack was looking up at him with a knowing smile. Spike tried to play it cool.

"Hey 'jack. 'sup?"

That might have been too cool.

"Not much, just lookin' fer Twilight," Applejack answered, still grinning.

"She's inside. You might wanna be careful though, she's in the middle of another research project. The place looks like a warzone."

"Much obliged Spike."

Applejack started to saunter into the treehouse, pausing to glance back up at Spike while he resettled himself on his branch.

"By the way Spike, you were muttering her name in your sleep."

"D'oh!"

The orange earth pony chuckled to herself as she nudged open the library's door and slipped inside. Spike hadn't been kidding about the mess, there were books piled everywhere. Closed books had been stacked haphazardly on the floor, while more lay open on every available horizontal surface. In the middle of it all stood a violet unicorn pony with a frazzled mane, bloodshot eyes, and a nervous tic, using her telekinesis to add ever more notes to a scroll that appeared to be in excess of six feet long.

"Land sakes Twi, you're workin' yourself into a right old tizzy there!"

Twilight Sparkle startled, her writing quill shooting across the room and embedding itself in a far wall.

"... um, I dunno what's so all-fired important there but maybe it's about time you had a break."

Twilight looked about to object, and strenuously, but Applejack forestalled the yelling with the tried and true method of carefully inserting an apple into the unicorn's open mouth. Twilight let out a muffled scream, then her eyes widened and she started munching. Applejack sat back with a satisfied smile on her face as Twilight greedily devoured the apple before collapsing back into her chair with a sigh.

"... okay, break time it is. Thanks Applejack."

"Any time sugarcube. What's got you goin' like this anyhow? Looks like you're takin' this here project a bit more serious than usual."

"This is a special project!" Twilight enthused, eyes gleaming, "I'm taking on an assignment directly from Princess Celestia and Princess Luna!"

"Luna too, huh? How's that filly doin'? I ain't seen hide nor hair of her since we beat the crap outta her with magic friendship rainbows."

Twilight blinked, her eyes going slightly derpy for a moment, and then she passed an opened scroll to Applejack.

"Princess Celestia says she's doing a lot better. She's been letting Luna help her raise and lower the moon, and she says that's been helping. Apparently she's really worried about something, though. That's what this project is about, though they won't tell me any details."

"I'd hate to think what might get an alicorn princess worried," said Applejack with a shudder as she looked over the scroll. She didn't understand most of Celestia's more arcane instructions, but she could tell from the wording in the letter that the monarch was unsettled by her sister's concerns. "You have any idea what might be up?"

"I think it has something to do with the moon," said Twilight, tapping a complicated looking series of equations in the middle of the scroll. "Celestia asked me to do a thorough survey of the moon and its nearby stars, comparing them as they are now to how they looked before Nightmare Moon was freed from her imprisonment. She wants to know if there's been any aberrant movement."

"Movement?" asked Applejack, somewhat wide-eyed, "from the moon? Gosh. It's not gonna

like, fall on us is it?"

Twilight laughed.

"Oh, no, nothing that drastic! ...I think. In any case, that's why they're having me take a look, because if there is anything wrong then as long as we know before things become irreversibly damaged then they can correct it. Manipulation of the spheres is the princess' special talent, after all."

"Heckuva talent," said Applejack, looking at a large book full of star charts.

"Yeah, it's pretty amazing when you think about it. We're really very lucky that Princess Celestia and Luna are as benevolent as they are. A being with the power to alter the rhythm of the celestial bodies could literally shatter the world and annihilate every living thing on it."

Applejack's eyes slowly widened. Twilight decided it was time to change the subject.

"So what brings you out this way Applejack? Looking for another book on apples?"

Applejack shook her head.

"I actually was just sort of wantin' to say hi, I hadn't seen you for a few days. I was also gonna ask if you'd seen Dollars to Donuts, but if you've been cooped up in here the whole time I suppose you probably ain't."

Twilight yawned and blinked.

"Dollars to...?"

"A mare I know. Earth pony, has a cutie mark that looks like a green flag?"

"Can't say I've seen her. A green flag cutie mark? What kind of special talent does she have?"

"She don't know how to quit," Applejack sighed. "I knew her in school and she kind of took a shine to me, maybe a bit too much of one if you catch my meanin'? But she drops by to chat every once in a while and the last time I saw her she got it into her thick skull to explore the Everfree forest. Of course I told her not to, but she never did take kindly to being told she couldn't do somethin', and I ain't seen her since, and now I'm worried."

"Well, I haven't been out of the library for a little while and I definitely haven't seen any earth ponies going into the forest," said Twilight, pausing again to yawn uproariously, "but you might head over to Zecora's hut and see if she's seen anything. She knows the Everfree Forest pretty well."

"Ya know what Twi that's a right clever idea, I'll rustle up somepony to watch my rump for critters and go give that Zebra a visit. Thanks a bunch."

"No problem. Oh, and watch out for chickens."

"Sure I... what?"

"They'll turn you to stone."

"... you really need to get some sleep Twi."

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The creature struggled. Everything was noise and cold and confusion. Its spiracles were full of water. This was not what was supposed to be. It should be feeding on the corpse of its host, safely nestled in a nest of bone and flesh. Instead it could barely breathe, and the pounding current swept it helplessly along.

Conscious thoughts as ponies would know them did not exist within the creature's mind, and yet it had a sentience of sorts. It felt not fear, but a kind of disappointment. It could not fulfill the biological urges that drove it forward. To eat. To grow. To reproduce. Instead it was helpless and frustrated, slowly choking to death in this endless river. Rage filled the creature as its struggles became weaker and weaker. Its final thought before succumbing to darkness was a half-formed idea that its host must have been a respectably vindictive individual for birthing it directly into a death trap.

Mere seconds after the creature went limp, something seized the nape of its neck, and it was drawn out of the water.

"Mmmf, paugh! What in Equestria is this Angel bunny? It doesn't look like any fish that I've ever laid eyes on."

Angel circled the strange creature warily, his little nose snuffing intently. After a few rotations he simply threw up his little paws in confusion. Fluttershy sighed and nodded, examining the thing minutely herself. But she was just as stumped as the rabbit.

Fluttershy didn't have the expertise of a trained zoologist, but she knew taxonomy. The wheezing creature curled up on the ground in front of her didn't fit into any sort of classification that she had ever heard of. It had no limbs, like a snake, and the pronounced dorsal ridge indicated the presence of a backbone, but instead of scales its hide was segmented like an exoskeleton, and it had no visible facial features except for an oddly toothsome mouth. Fluttershy would have classified it as some kind of armored blind cave eel, but it had clearly

been drowning not a moment before, its physiology was only superficially consistent with anguilliformes, placodermi were extinct, and it wasn't anywhere near a cave.

"I think this is some other kind of weird magical creature that I'm not familiar with," she said with a sigh. This was going to turn out just like the time with the parasprites, wasn't it?

Angel made a shoving motion with one foot, miming the act of kicking the strange little monster back into the river. Fluttershy frowned hugely and shook her head.

"No, no matter what it is, this little creature needs help, and I'm going to help it."

The pegasus pony gently lifted the creature onto her back and turned to hover gently in the direction of her cottage. Angel sighed and followed. He just knew he was going to regret this.

-End of Part 2

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